

2010 Military Family Life Project

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a briefing based on the *2010 Military Family Life Project (2010 MFLP)*. Topics include housing and Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves, education and employment, spouse's family, mental and physical well-being, financial well-being, life in the military, members' deployments, the effect of deployments on children, and reunion and reintegration. A summary of survey methodology is provided at the end of this paper.

Summary of Topics Covered in Briefing

Housing and Permanent Change of Station (PCS) Moves

- 25% of spouses indicated living in *on* base military housing, 7% indicated living in *off* base military housing, and 67% indicated living in civilian housing.
- 77% of spouses experienced a PCS move during their husband/wife's active duty career.
 - Of these spouses, 12% took *less than 1 month to find employment after last PCS move*, 25% took *1 month to less than 4 months*, 22% took *4 months to less than 7 months*, 11% took *7 months to less than 10 months*, 6% took *10 months to less than 12 months*, and 25% took *1 year or more*.

Education and Employment

- 26% of spouses are currently enrolled in school/training; 48% are not currently enrolled, but would like to be in school/training; and 26% are not currently enrolled, and do not want to be in school/training.
- 57% of spouses indicated they were in the labor force, meaning they were employed or had been looking for work
 - Of those in the labor force, 26% were unemployed.
- Of the 43% of spouses not in the labor force, the top two reasons for not looking for work were *wanting to be able to stay home to care for their children (73%)* and *not wanting to work (40%)*.
- Of the 42% of spouses who were employed, 38% worked part-time (fewer than 35 hours per week).
 - The top two reasons for working part-time were *other (24%)* and *could only find part-time work (21%)*.

- The top three career fields of spouses who had been employed at some point in their lives were *other* (25%), *retail/customer service* (18%), and *health care/health services* (16%).
- The top three sources used to find their current/most recent job were *contacting the employer directly* (45%), *information provided by a friend or relative* (28%), and *other* (28%).
- 77% of all spouses reported wanting to work and 57% reported needing to work.
- The top three reasons spouses gave for why working is important were *wanting to save money for the future* (89%), *desire for career* (68%), and *wanting extra money to use now* (67%).

Spouse's Family

- About a quarter of spouses indicated that they and/or a family member have a *special medical need* (28%) or a *special educational need* (27%).
- 25% of spouses indicated they had special medical/educational needs, 24% indicated their child(ren) had special medical/educational needs, and 17% indicated their husband/wife had special medical/educational needs.
- About three-fourths of spouses (72%) indicated having children under the age of 18 living at home either part-time or full-time.
 - Of these spouses, 18% have a child(ren) from a previous relationship, 10% have a child(ren) from their husband/wife's previous relationship, and 7% were otherwise related to the child(ren).

Mental and Physical Well-Being

- Overall, 11% of spouses rated the current level of stress in their personal life less than usual; 52% more than usual.
- On a scale from 0 to 12, the average frequency of mental health problems, measured using the overall Patient Health Questionnaire, indicated by spouses was 2.6.
- More than a third of spouses indicated experiencing feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge (52%); not being able to stop or control worrying (45%); feeling down, depressed, or hopeless (39%); and little interest or pleasure in doing things (37%) in the past two weeks.
- On a scale from 21 to 105, the average overall Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scale (F-COPES) score for spouses was 69.1 compared to the civilian average of 65.0. The average scores for the five F-COPES sub-scales were: *Reframing* (3.9), *Acquiring Social Support* (3), *Mobilizing to Acquire and Accept Help* (3), *Seeking Spiritual Support* (3), and *Passive Appraisal* (2.3). The average overall score was 3.3.

- The majority (84%) of spouses were satisfied with their marriage right now; 8% dissatisfied.
- About two-fifths (41%) indicated they have problems in their personal relationship with their husband/wife less often compared to six months ago; 14% more often.
- The average overall Marital Instability Index (MII) for spouses was 1.6 out of 5 where a higher total score indicates higher levels of instability in the marriage. For each of the MII factors, spouses indicated *they thought marriage might be in trouble* (58%), *they thought of getting a divorce/separation crossed their mind in the past 3 years* (41%), *they seriously suggested the idea of divorce within the past 3 years* (28%), *they discussed divorce/separation with a close friend* (26%), and *they talked to an attorney* (12%).
- About one-sixth (17%) of spouses indicated talking to a counselor in the past six months.
 - The top four issues they discussed in counseling were: *coping with stress* (80%), *family issues* (77%), *marital issues* (74%); and *problem solving* (71%).
 - The top three sources of counseling were *TRICARE* (52%), *Military OneSource* (36%), and *another source* (34%).
 - About half (51%) who used TRICARE found it very useful; 54% who used Military OneSource found it very useful; 58% who used another source found it very useful.
- Over three-fourths of spouses (78%) indicated having concerns that would factor into their decision regarding counseling.
 - Top three concerns were *would be difficulty getting time off work or child care for counseling* (21%), *it would harm spouse's career* (19%), and *counseling costs too much money* (18%).

Financial Well-Being

- The average total household gross (before-tax) earnings in an average month indicated by spouses was \$7,401.
- Overall, 59% of spouses were comfortable with their financial condition; 16% not comfortable.
 - 66% have \$500 or more in emergency savings and 64% save regularly by putting money aside each month.
- Less than one-tenth (8%) of spouses used specific military-sponsored financial services in the past six months.

Life in the Military

- Overall, 62% of spouses are satisfied with the military way of life; 14% dissatisfied.

- More than two-thirds (69%) of spouses favor their husband/wife staying on active duty; 19% favor leaving.
- Overall, 74% of spouses agreed deployed Service members are making a difference in the world; 8% disagree.
- One quarter (25%) of spouses agreed the American public supports the war; 43% disagreed.
- On a scale from 0 to 72, the average overall Social Support Index (SSI) score for spouses was 46.5. The average scores for the four SSI sub-scales were *Family Affection and Commitment* (4.3), *Emotional, Esteem, and Friendship Network Support* (3.7), *Family Community Connection* (3.5), and *Community as a Source of Support* (3.4). The average score on the SSI was 3.7.
- 25% of spouses used Military OneSource in the past 6 months to *obtain information*, 20% used it to *obtain Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA)*, 8% indicated *another use*, and 5% used it to *obtain counseling*.

Member's Deployments

- The majority (85%) of spouses indicated their husband/wife had been deployed for more than 30 consecutive days in their active duty career.
 - Spouses reported an average of 4.8 deployments during the member's career.
 - 74% indicated their husband/wife's most recent deployment was to a combat zone.
 - 60% indicated their husband/wife had been deployed to Iraq/Afghanistan.
 - About 73% of spouses reported experiencing multiple deployments.
 - About a quarter (24%) of these spouses found coping with deployments had become less difficult with each experience; 30% more difficult.
 - On average, it had been 25 months since their husband/wife's last departure for deployment.
 - The top two problems experienced, to a large extent, during their husband/wife's most recent deployment were *loneliness* (41%) and *being a "single" parent* (28%).
 - The top two communications methods used during deployment were *e-mail* (92%) and *telephone* (92%).
 - The majority of spouses used the *commissary* (84%) and the *exchange* (80%) during their husband/wife's deployment.
 - More than two-fifths of these indicated shopping less often at the *commissary* (42%) and/or *exchange* (45%) during their husband/wife's deployment.
 - The top two reasons indicated for shopping less often at the commissary and/or exchange during the most recent deployment were the *driving distance to commissary/exchange* (48%) and their *needs have changed* (46%).

Effect of Deployments on Children

- 70% of spouses with children identified a child in their household at random¹ and answered questions about this one child. Fifty-one percent of the selected children were male and 49% were female. The average age of the child selected by spouses was 6.7.
 - More than two-thirds (69%) of spouses indicated they agree this child has been more willing to try new things in the past four weeks.
 - The average Attachment Behavior Index (AQS) score (average insecurity score) for this child was 2.2 on a five point scale, where a higher score indicates a higher level of insecurity.
 - The majority (85%) of spouses reported this child was living at home during their husband/wife's most recent deployment.
 - This child had experienced, on average, 2.9 deployments.
 - The top three resources used by this child during the most recent deployment were *stable household routine* (95%), *caregiver and/or teacher support/understanding* (83%), and *geographical stability* (76%).
 - The average score of problematic behaviors for this child, from the overall Child Behavior Checklist, is 1.5 out of 7 where a higher score indicates a higher incident of problematic behaviors.
 - The top three behavioral reactions of this child to the most recent deployment were *closeness to family members* (74%), *pride in having a military parent* (74%), and *acceptance of responsibility* (63%).
 - 53% of spouses used child care during their husband/wife's deployment.
 - Of these, about two thirds (72%) indicated deployment increased their need for child care.
 - 62% indicated their child was able to stay connected well to their husband/wife given deployment separations; 59% indicated their child coped well with their husband/wife's deployment.

Reunion and Reintegration

- 85% of spouses indicated their husband/wife had been deployed for more than 30 consecutive days in their active duty career.
 - 3% indicated during their husband/wife's most recent deployment, he/she was wounded.
 - 26% of these members were wounded in a way that interfered with their ability to participate in the family.

¹ Spouses were asked to choose a child in their household with the birth month closest to theirs.

- 14% indicated their *husband/wife had returned, but since redeployed*; 71% indicated their *husband/wife had returned and not redeployed*; and 14% indicated their *husband/wife had not returned*.
- 86% had experienced at least one reunion.
 - The average amount of time since their active duty member returned home was 23 months.
 - About three-fourths (72%) of these members returned from a combat zone.
 - More than a quarter of spouses indicated, to a large extent, that their husband/wife *appreciates family and friends more* (30%) and *appreciates life more* (27%).
 - Almost half (48%) of spouses indicated their readjustment to having their husband/wife home after his/her deployment *was easy*; 23% indicated readjustment *was difficult*.
- Of spouses who had children during their husband/wife's most recent deployment and whose husband/wife returned from deployment, 63% found their *husband/wife's reconnection with their children easy*; 15% found it *difficult*.
- Top three resources spouses used at any point in member's recent deployment cycle include *gym/fitness center* (40%), *information/support provided by husband/wife's unit* (37%), and *informational briefings* (35%).
 - The top three resources spouses used prior to member's recent deployment cycle include *informational briefings* (86%), *other support* (70%), and the *gym/fitness center* (67%).
 - The top three resources spouses whose husband/wife had been deployed used during the member's deployment were *Military Spouse Support Group* (94%), *other support* (94%), and the *gym/fitness center* (93%).
 - The top three resources spouses whose husband/wife had returned from deployment used after the member's deployment were *gym/fitness center* (68%), *other support* (68%), and *services/support from military chaplain/civilian religious leader* (66%).
- 70% of spouses expect their husband/wife will be deployed in the future.
 - The amount of time expected until the next deployment was *within 3 months* (16%), *in 4 to 6 months* (13%), *in 7 to 9 months* (11%), *in 10 to 12 months* (16%), *in 13 to 18 months* (14%), *in 19 to 24 months* (12%), and *in more than 24 months* (19%).
- The majority (83%) of spouses indicated their husband/wife had no plans to leave the military within the next 12 months, 7% indicated their husband/wife was definitely separating from the military, and 10% indicated there was a possibility of their husband/wife separating from military.

Survey Methodology

Data Sources.

The 2010 MFLP was both a Web-based and paper-and-pen survey that assessed the attitudes and opinions of active duty spouses. Data were collected on behalf of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSD[P&R]) from May 20 to August 31, 2010.

The target population for the 2010 MFLP consisted of spouses of active duty members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force who (1) had at least six months of service at the time the questionnaire is first fielded and (2) were below flag rank. Spouses of National Guard/Reserve members and warrant officers were excluded from the target population. In addition, for the respondent to remain eligible, they must have indicated that, at the time of the survey, they were currently married to an active duty member and not currently a Service member themselves. Completed surveys (defined as 50% or more of the survey questions asked of all participants were answered, including the three eligibility questions) were received from 28,552 eligible respondents. The overall weighted response rate was 30%. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of respondents analyzed in this report.

Table 1.

Active Duty Member Characteristics	Percent	Active Duty Spouse Characteristics	Percent
Service		Gender	
Army	40	Male	5
Navy	24	Female	95
Marine Corps	13	Race/Ethnicity	
Air Force	24	Non-Hispanic White	68
Paygrade		Non-Hispanic Black	9
E1-E4	27	Hispanic	12
E5-E9	53	Education	
O1-O3	9	No College	16
O4-O6	10	Some College	49
Deployment Status		4-Year College Degree	25
Not Deployed Career	15	Graduate/Professional Degree	10
Deployed Career	82	Employment	
Deployed Past 24 Mo	41	Employed	57
Not Deployed Past 24 Mo	56	Unemployed	74
PCS Status		Not in Labor Force	26
PCS in Past 12 months	23		
No PCS in Past 12 months	75		
Family Status			
With Child(ren)	72		
Without Child(ren)	28		

Margins of Error

The complex sample designs require weighting to produce population estimates such as percentages.² Because of the weighting, conventional formulas for calculating the margin of error will overstate the reliability of the estimate. For this report, variance estimates were calculated using SUDAAN[®] PROC DESCRIPT (Research Triangle Institute, 2004).

By definition, sample surveys are subject to sampling error. Standard errors are estimates of the variance around population parameters, such as percentages or means, and are used to construct margins of error (i.e., confidence interval half-widths). Percentages and means are reported with margins of error based on 95% confidence intervals.³

Tests of Significance for Subgroups

When reporting current survey results, the mean (or proportion) of each subgroup is compared⁴ to its respective “all other” group. The “all other” group refers to the total population minus the group being assessed. For example, Army’s “all other” group consists of Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force members. Excluding the subject group from the total enables an accurate test of whether the group differs from those not in the group.

Prepared by: (b)(6)
Survey Design, Analysis, & Operations Branch
Human Resources Strategic Assessment Program, DMDC

For further information, see <http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/surveys>.

² As a result of differential weighting, only certain statistical software procedures, such as SUDAAN PROC DESCRIPT, correctly calculate standard errors, variances, or tests of statistical significance for stratified samples.

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³ The margin of error represents the degree of certainty that the percentage or mean would fall within the interval in repeated samples of the population. For example, if 55% of individuals selected an answer and the margin of error was ± 3 in repeated surveyed samples from the population, the percentage of individuals selecting the same answer would be between 52% (55 minus 3) and 58% (55 plus 3) in 95% of the samples.

⁴ DMDC used t tests in this survey note to test the difference between two means or proportions. This survey note highlights only differences significant at the $\alpha = .01$ level.